

FARM BILLS FALLOUT

India's ruling BJP's oldest ally
Shromani Akali Dal quits NDA
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The Daily Star



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DGs run by a driver!

Investigations, staff narratives yet to shed light on how a Class-IV staffer dictated terms of health directorate; stories of his partners in the corruption remain untold

MOHAMMAD AL MASUM MOLLA and MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

Directors general came and went, but the power and influence that the health directorate driver gained stayed. Through his unholy alliance with key officials at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), Abdul Malek, who studied up to class 8, had powers that could be compared to those of the DG. "Be it a transfer request or a coveted work order, people would turn up to Malek. They knew Malek would get things done," said a line director, wishing not to be named. The staggering wealth accumulated by Malek and him becoming what many called the shadow DG have been the talk of the town after Rab arrested him last week. Investigations revealed that he has wealth valued at no less than Tk 1,000 crore. The Daily Star visited the DGHS several times, talked to over a dozen employees of different levels, and officials of the investigating agencies, but all they could tell is how the health directorate succumbed to the influence of a grade IV employee. Nobody opened up about Malek's partners

in crime. "The case of Malek is just the tip of the iceberg. There are even more corrupt people at the DGHS. Like him, some grade III and IV employees might get caught. But DGs, ADGs, and line directors will remain beyond reach," said a top official of the DGHS. Malek, now aged around 60, formed a driver's association and became its president only to influence the drivers' recruitment and transfers. Some of the DGHS officials did not raise a voice against him because they were afraid while others only made him stronger, according to sources. Even the immediate past DG, Dr Abul Kalam Azad, chose not to bother Malek. This frustrated many doctors and top officials. It is a custom at the DGHS to place wreaths at the sculpture of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on the DGHS premises on August 15. Over the years, the DG accompanied by other top officials placed the wreath. In recent years, Malek started accompanying the DG. "Many doctors felt insulted and they refrained from joining the programme," said an official.

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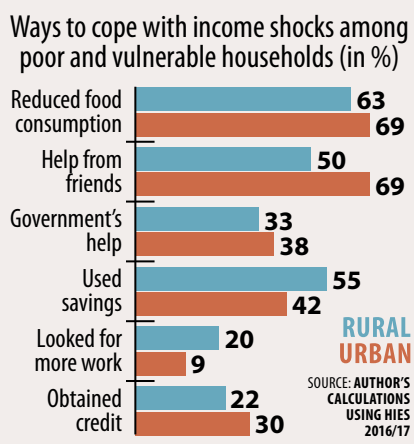


68pc lost jobs in Dhaka and Ctg

Finds a rapid phone survey by World Bank on those who stopped working during pandemic

REJAUJ KARIM BYRON and AHSAN HABIB

Around 68 percent of the people who had to stop working in urban areas of Dhaka and Chattogram due to the pandemic have lost their jobs, according to a World Bank report. The rate of the job losses was 76 percent in the capital while it was 59 percent in the port city, said the report, titled "Losing Livelihoods: The labour market impacts of Covid-19 in Bangladesh". Slum areas witnessed higher -- 71 percent -- job losses than non-slum areas where it was 61 percent, it said, adding that some of the people expecting to resume their previous jobs may not be able to do so, thus the actual job losses may have been even higher. The report was prepared based on rapid panel phone surveys among respondents from Dhaka, Chattogram and Cox's Bazar. The survey was carried out in two phases -- one after the pandemic began and the second one from June 10 to July 10.



In Dhaka, one in four respondents reported not actively working in the week preceding their interviews but having worked before March 25. This figure was 22 percent in Chattogram. In Cox's Bazar, economic lockdowns

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SAUDI RETURNEES Many worried despite govt assurances

JAMIL MAHMUD and RASHIDUL HASAN

Migrant workers, who had been stranded at home ever since they came back from Saudi Arabia for holidays, yesterday said they were worried about the renewal of their work permits despite assurance from Bangladesh government. The workers were not able to fly back to the Gulf country due to the Covid-19 pandemic. A number of them said their work permits were not renewed even after the Saudi government announced an automatic extension of the validity of the work permits earlier this month. Some saw their work permits renewed following the announcement but the extended validity will end soon, they added. Several thousand migrant workers yesterday rushed to the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in the capital's Gulshan diplomatic area after Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen on Wednesday said they

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3 INCREASE FLIGHTS: MOMEN TO KSA -- PAGE 2

BCL REIGN OVER MC COLLEGE Crimes thrive on factional politics

2 accused in rape case held

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

Ten years ago, Uday Singha Palash, a student of Murari Chand College and a Bangladesh Chhatra League activist, was murdered in Sylhet city's Tilagarh area in a factional clash. The college's BCL unit was then dissolved and no new committee has since been formed, but BCL activists are still involved with factional politics. Since 2018, four BCL activists were murdered in separate incidents, and they were said to be victims of factional clashes. The actions of BCL activists have come under the spotlight after six were accused -- and two arrested yesterday -- of raping a woman in the college's hostel on Friday night, creating a furore in the country and sparking protests. Asad Uddin Ahmed, former general secretary of Sylhet city Awami League, said, "It took a long process of bad practice to turn some young BCL activists into people who could commit heinous crimes. There are senior political leaders backing them. To achieve their [leaders'] political ambition, they use the students. Overlooking these activists' smaller crimes has led to the situation we are facing now. The backers of the rape accused should be punished or at least socially dishonoured," he said. It was learned after talking with several present and

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Mahbubey Alam passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent jurist and Attorney General of the republic Advocate Mahbubey Alam is no more. He was 72. He passed away at 7:25pm yesterday while undergoing treatment at the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in Dhaka, Sumon Mahbub, son of Advocate Mahbubey Alam, told The Daily Star last night. Mahbubey Alam's son-in-law Reajul Hoque said they were yet to decide where the burial would take place. The longest-serving attorney general of

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RAPE OF CHAKMA GIRL All 9 rapists are robbers

Claim Khagrachhari police

SANJOY KUMAR BARUA

All the nine rapists who raped a Chakma girl are professional robbers and they confessed about their crimes, police said in a press conference in Khagrachhari. Mohammad Abdul Aziz, superintendent of police in Khagrachhari, said they already arrested seven of the nine accused and were trying to arrest the rest. The arrested criminals confessed that they raped the girl and looted valuables from her house, he said. "They all have previous criminal records. They met each other in jail," the police official said. Those criminals intruded into the victim's house at 2:30am and stayed there for two hours till 4:30 am, he further said, adding that all the accused hailed from different upazilas in Khagrachhari district. The arrested accused are Amin, 40, Belal Hossen,

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VOICES RAISED FOR RAPE VICTIMS -- PHOTOS ON PAGE 3



Buses parked right in the middle of a street near the capital's Mohakhali inter-district bus terminal cause traffic congestion on the busy road. The Dhaka North City Corporation has dedicated a part of the road for parking buses, but transport owners and workers keep their vehicles there. Inset, pedestrians try to go between buses there. The photos were taken at 6:30am yesterday.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

ARMENIA-AZERBAIJAN DISPUTE Heavy fighting tests shaky truce

Casualties reported on both sides; Turkey backs Baku; West, Russia call for calm

AGENCIES

Baku and Yerevan put themselves on a war footing after heavy fighting erupted yesterday between Azerbaijan and Armenian separatists, claiming military and civilian casualties on both sides. The worst clashes since 2016 have raised the spectre of a fresh war between arch enemies Azerbaijan and Armenia which have been locked for decades in a territorial dispute over the Armenia-backed breakaway region of Nagorny Karabakh. The region is internationally recognised as part of Azerbaijan but controlled by ethnic Armenians. Armenia and Azerbaijan broke away in the dying years of the Soviet Union. A major confrontation between the ex-Soviet Caucasus neighbours risks drawing in big regional players Moscow and Ankara. Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan yesterday pledged support for Muslim-majority Azerbaijan during the new crisis while Russia, traditionally seen as an ally of Armenia, called for an immediate ceasefire and talks to stabilise the situation. France, Germany and the EU swiftly urged an "immediate ceasefire," while Pope Francis prayed for peace. The Armenian defence ministry spokesman, Artsrun Hovhannisyanyan, said intense fighting continued along the Karabakh frontline yesterday afternoon. Azerbaijan said it had captured seven of its Armenian-controlled villages, a claim Yerevan denied. It also claimed to have killed sixteen Armenian separatist fighters.

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